



Young, Inactive and Overweight

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Since the late 1970s, the percentage of overweight children six to eighteen years old has more than doubled. Being overweight as an adolescent poses great health risks. Those who are seriously overweight as adolescents have a 50 to 100 percent greater mortality rate as young and middle-aged adults. Furthermore, what was once considered adult-onset diabetes is so common among today's overweight adolescents that it can't be called adult-onset any more.

Researchers view the current trends in children's weight with great concern. Now is the time to try and help the overweight among our youth. Here are some suggestions on how to go about doing it.

Parents and Children, Play Ball

Recess and gym class are becoming ancient history. After-school unwinding involves activities with computers and TV, instead of bikes and other active play. Experts generally recommend an hour a day of moderate activity. The key is to make activity fun. Kids don't want to be nagged. They want their parents to show them what to do.

Another way to increase activity is to limit television use. Children and adolescents watch an average of almost three hours of TV daily. Video and computer games raise that average to over six hours a day. The American Academy of Pediatrics urges parents to limit total screen time to no more than two hours daily.

Undoing the Jinx of Junk Food

One of the biggest obstacles is soft drink consumption, which rose 500 percent in the U.S. in the last five years. Sodas pose real difficulties for weight control. Research shows that we don't cut back on other foods to adjust for the extra calories we take in with soft drinks. Gradually choosing more fruits, whole grain cereals or other nutritious snacks, and limiting soft drinks, should be the objective.

The mostly plant-based diet recommended by the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR), emphasizing vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans, can also help with weight control. Only one in five children gets even the minimum recommendation of five fruits and vegetables a day. One goal might be to include several servings of fruit or vegetables in each meal. It's fine to start with one serving.

Proper portion sizes should also be served. The sizes of food portions both in and out of the home have increased dramatically. We eat substantially more than we need to when given larger portions.

Kids and parents say they want specific ideas for good tasting, healthy foods and ways to be active outside of team sports. One program to check out can be found at www.wellpoint.com/healthy_parenting/index.html. It's called "Healthy Habits for Healthy Kids."

AICR's *good-news-letter* is another way to help kids think about health. It's for children ages 7-10. A 6-issue subscription is \$5. Call AICR at 1-800-843-8114, ext. 110, to sign up. For quick and healthy meal ideas, as well as tips for adopting healthy portion sizes, check AICR's web site (www.aicr.org) with its many recipes.

If you need assistance with weight control, call your local Health and Wellness Center (HAWC) or Dietitian for additional guidance.

Shape Your Future...Your Weigh!™